

Executive Summary

Mississippi Connections Redevelopment Framework Plan

...“To develop a comprehensive plan that will redefine the “greater downtown area” to preserve its historical character while promoting the future viability of the community”... (Excerpt from the Task Force Mission Statement)

The downtown area of Elk River is the oldest part of the City and has long been considered the heart of the city. This area, the businesses in particular, have seen shopping patterns change, impacting the success of their businesses. Further, the downtown businesses, and the residential neighborhoods surrounding it, will be impacted by expected changes to Highway 10 in the next 2 decades. Highway 10 will evolve to an urban freeway in the future. It is not known when this will occur, but we know that it will further alter traffic patterns and impact businesses and homes in the area. Unaddressed, these changes can be devastating to fragile neighborhoods and businesses that are important to the Community of Elk River.

This document is intended to provide guidance to property owners, stakeholders, and community leadership to position the area in such a way that strengthens the area to survive the impacts of time and change; methods to reestablish the downtown area as a destination; a desirable address to do business, live, and enjoy the diversity of uses in a character rich downtown amid the hustle and bustle of a growing community.

The Plan was prepared by a City Council appointed task force comprised of 18 members representing a variety of community interests. Deliberations took place over a period of eleven meetings which covered a one year time period in 2006 and 2007.

The task force adopted the following vision statement to guide the formation of the plan: “The Mississippi Connections Study Area is the cornerstone of the community. The Redevelopment Framework **provides the blueprint for creating an environment and culture that encourages private reinvestment.** This environment will be characterized by a robust business climate, strong affordable residential neighborhoods, diverse recreational opportunities, an agreed upon transportation framework, recognition of its historical place, and enhancing opportunities for connections with the community.”

It soon became evident that expected changes to Highway 10 (originally identified during as part of the 2002 Inter-Regional Corridor Plan) would have a far greater impact to the downtown core than originally thought. To gain a better understanding of these changes, the City Council tabled the Task Force in 2007, and worked with MnDOT on a more defined Highway 10 plan through the City. That plan was approved in late 2008.

The task force was reconvened in 2011, adding more resident and business representatives. Over 10 months starting in 2011, the Task Force reviewed the plan, updating it to address new information and goals. This Plan represents both the approved

Highway 10 planned improvements and the task force's response to those changes.

This vision, albeit appearing idealistic in form, is a long term plan that allows the City to guide its own fate as development and redevelopment opportunities present themselves to the community.

The nature of a redevelopment framework plan demands imagination, a strong vision, and patience. The framework is both a strategic and tactical description of how a community will address complicated issues such as changing markets, commitments to a process and defining an ultimate vision for the future.

The following is a summary of the Task Force's philosophy behind the framework, some of the key

planning elements, and comments regarding its implementation. The mission and vision statements, as shown at the top of this section, drove the formation of this plan.

1. 20-Year Vision- the redevelopment framework is designed by necessity to have a long term horizon for completion. However, this reality should not serve as deterrence to either starting the plan or waiting for ideal market conditions. The framework's "Implementation Priorities" articulate, in detail, tasks needed to be done within the first three years of plan initiation followed by long term objectives. Working hard in the first three years to establish momentum and excitement will serve to propel the vision forward with commitment and conviction.

The collection of small projects builds more momentum from property owners, stakeholders, and other interests.

2. "Redefine"- the strongest operative words found within the mission statement is...'*redefine the "greater downtown area"*'.... The word "redefine" carries with it both the most controversial aspect of the redevelopment framework (physical change) but it also explicitly conveys the hope and vision of the plan. The intent of the framework is to respond to time and market changes that have already occurred, and to redefine a context for present and future development/redevelopment opportunities, offering guidance and opportunity for the area to survive these changes, many of which establish a development pattern much different from what the area was formed under. "Redefine" becomes both the vision and the intrinsic value of recognizing the need for careful and guided change.

3. History- the greatest challenge to the Task Force was creating a framework that balanced future changes with the area's history and environmental assets and opportunities. The framework anticipates saving major core downtown block of buildings at Jackson and Main, the water tower, reinvigorating the single family neighborhoods, re-establishing the Mississippi and the Elk Rivers as a commemoration to past history, by constructing interpretive signage and venues that tells the "Elk River Story". The framework envisions, in part, the creation of a new history committed to attracting the community as a whole to enjoy this area's uniqueness and opportunities. Building on our rich history will take time and patience but this objective is a critical tenant of the plan.

4. “Core Downtown”- the Task Force’s vision is based on a future market that will seek rehabilitation and redevelopment opportunities, especially for properties situated along the Mississippi River. The plan seeks to establish the “Brick and S. Main Blocks” as the center for historical rehabilitation and creates a path to determine the economic viability of this objective. Lastly, the plan attempts to provide opportunities to draw people to the core downtown. Festivals, markets, music events, in addition to physical connections to the river to promote the core as a destination, a characterization that will be more and more important as travel patterns evolve away from the direct access currently employed.

5. Single Family Neighborhoods- the redevelopment framework’s philosophy started with the premise of preserving the single family neighborhoods, some for the rich asset of affordability and other sectors for their historical quality. A goal of the plan is that the commercial redevelopment and reinvestment successes on both sides of Highway 10 will translate directly into reinvestment interest by residential property owners.

6. “North of Highway 10”- the area of most significant change is the 5 block area north of Highway 10. The Task Force envisions that as market dictates, this will evolve into a destination neighborhood. An “employment center” (e.g. office, medical, institutional) to bring daytime users that support the core downtown commercial is envisioned. Additionally, a higher density residential component should be located abutting Lions Park, coupled with a greenway and strategically located storm water assets. This Study Area also creates the greatest challenge for redevelopment due to the type of existing buildings, number of buildings, limited inherent physical assets, and no immediate strong market

demand. All of which will be necessary in order to create the magnitude of real estate value that would make redevelopment feasible. While market driven, any redevelopment of this area will likely require taxpayer assistance, in the form of financial incentives and assistance, regulatory changes, and land acquisition.

7. Commitment to Implement- no redevelopment framework has value until commitment to implement is agreed upon by all affected parties; this community consensus is only initiated by the City Council’s adoption of the Plan. With this consensus, an agreed upon set of priorities and a work plan is established to begin the process of creating the foundational steps of the Plan.

8. Financial Commitment- due to the economics of redevelopment and revitalization, no vision can be implemented without a major financial commitment by the City. Some of the redevelopment costs will realistically have to be absorbed through the use of tax increment, tax abatement and other forms of public/private participation. In addition, taxpayers should anticipate the City may have to capitalize rehabilitation related funds and commit to significant capital improvements involving open space and other infrastructure costs.

In conclusion, the *Mississippi Connections* Redevelopment Framework serves as a collection of prioritized tasks and goals. Elements of the framework may have to be altered over time but the commitment to start the implementation inherently to pursue the redevelopment objectives vigorously should translate into making this part of Elk River strong and sustainable.

Acknowledgements

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John Anderson	Resident Representative
Keith Holme	Business Representative
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Molly Nadeau	Resident Representative
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Housing & Redevelopment Authority
Heritage Preservation Commission
Parks & Recreation Commission
Planning Commission
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I. Introduction

This document describes the formation of the Downtown Task Force, and their development of an Illustrative Master Plan (Plan) for the long-range vision for the 432-acre core of the City of Elk River. The purpose of this Plan is threefold: to serve as a blueprint for the City to respond to private investment proposals, and as a work plan for the City to create and maintain an environment in a manner consistent with the community's vision. Lastly, the plan is intended to communicate to property owners and those interested in the area the City's long term goals for the area.

This document consists of four sections:

1. Summary of Existing Conditions provides the background information used to shape the Plan.
2. The Vision and Illustrative Master Plan provide a visual representation and description of the type and character of desired development. This section references the summary of public input used to shape this Plan. The Goals and Policies set forth community aspirations for the study area and were used as a guide to follow in designing the long-range vision.
3. The Specific Area Strategies section contains the guide for public and private investment to occur over the 20-year timeframe.
4. The Implementation Priorities section presents proposed public actions and investments needed to realize the desired changes in the study area. Implementation will be

an evolutionary process which will occur over time and not overnight. The City hopes that public involvement, as exemplified by this Plan, will attract new private investment to Elk River.

a. Background

The City Council created a Task Force on October 2, 2006 for the purpose of creating a Plan for the "greater downtown area" and to provide direction and frequent feedback to the Technical Advisory Team made up of city staff and consultants.

The Task Force paused in late 2007 to allow for the completion of the Highway 10 plan as it routes through the downtown area. Following completion of the Highway 10 plan in early 2009, and the review of the Highway 10 plan at the Federal level, the Task Force reconvened in November 2011.

This Plan was developed based closely on the desires and vision of the Task Force members, representing various interests throughout the City.

b. Task Force Mission Statement

Following City Council's appointment, the Task Force developed and adopted the following mission statement which describes their role in the creation of this Plan:

Mission Statement –

To develop a comprehensive plan that will redefine the "greater downtown area" to preserve its historical character while promoting the future viability of the community.

Maximum public input will be gathered to create and assess alternatives resulting in a formal redevelopment plan with a combination of a master vision, working policies, specific area recommendations and implementation priorities.

c. Mississippi Connections Redevelopment Framework Vision Statement

The following vision statement summarizes the end objective, purpose and intent of the Plan:

Vision Statement –

The Mississippi Connections Study Area is the cornerstone of the community. The Redevelopment Framework provides the blueprint for creating an environment and culture that encourages private reinvestment. This environment will be characterized by a robust business climate, strong affordable residential neighborhoods, diverse recreational opportunities, an agreed upon transportation framework, recognition of its historical place, and enhancing opportunities for connections with the community.

d. Study Area Defined

The Task Force identified the study area boundaries starting from the “historic” core downtown area and expanded outward to include the adjacent areas which have tangible and intangible interrelationships with the health and vitality of the core downtown area. This “greater downtown area” is what is referred to herein the Plan as the “Study Area”.

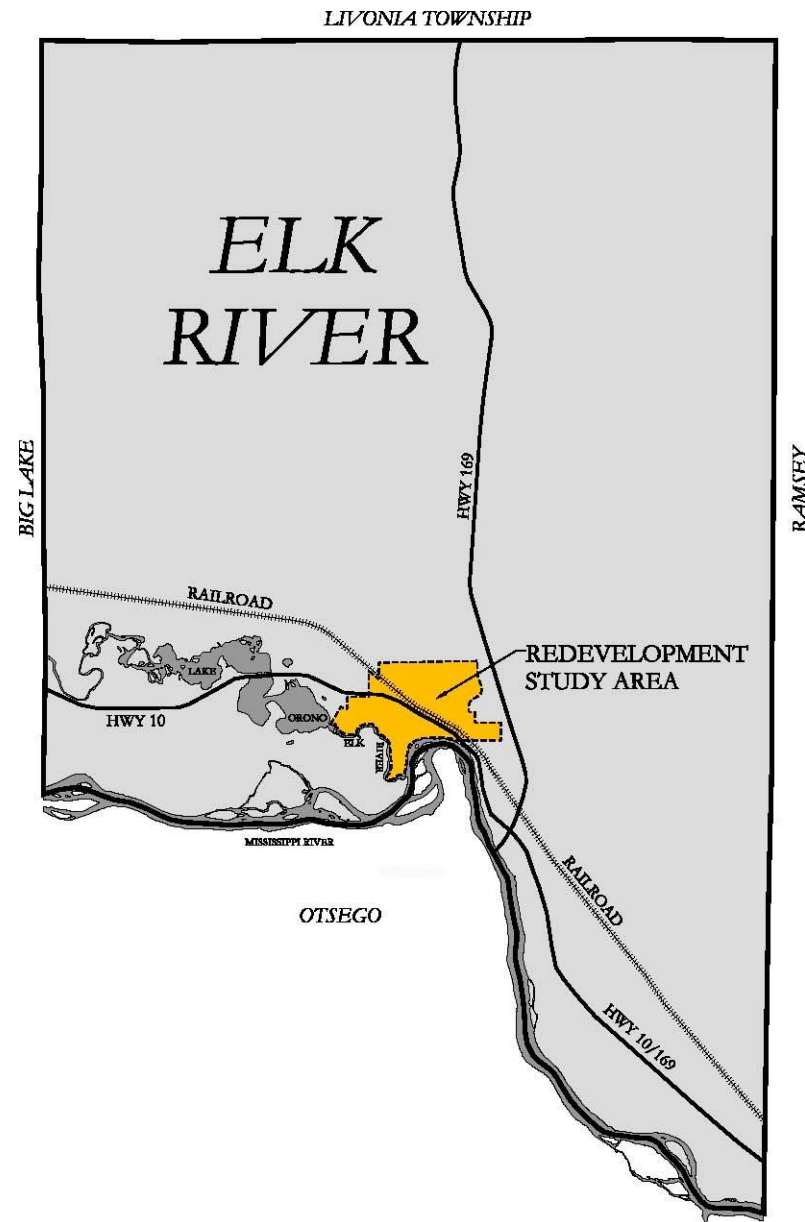
The Study Area encompasses the 432-acre south central core of the City of Elk River and includes a variety of land use components.

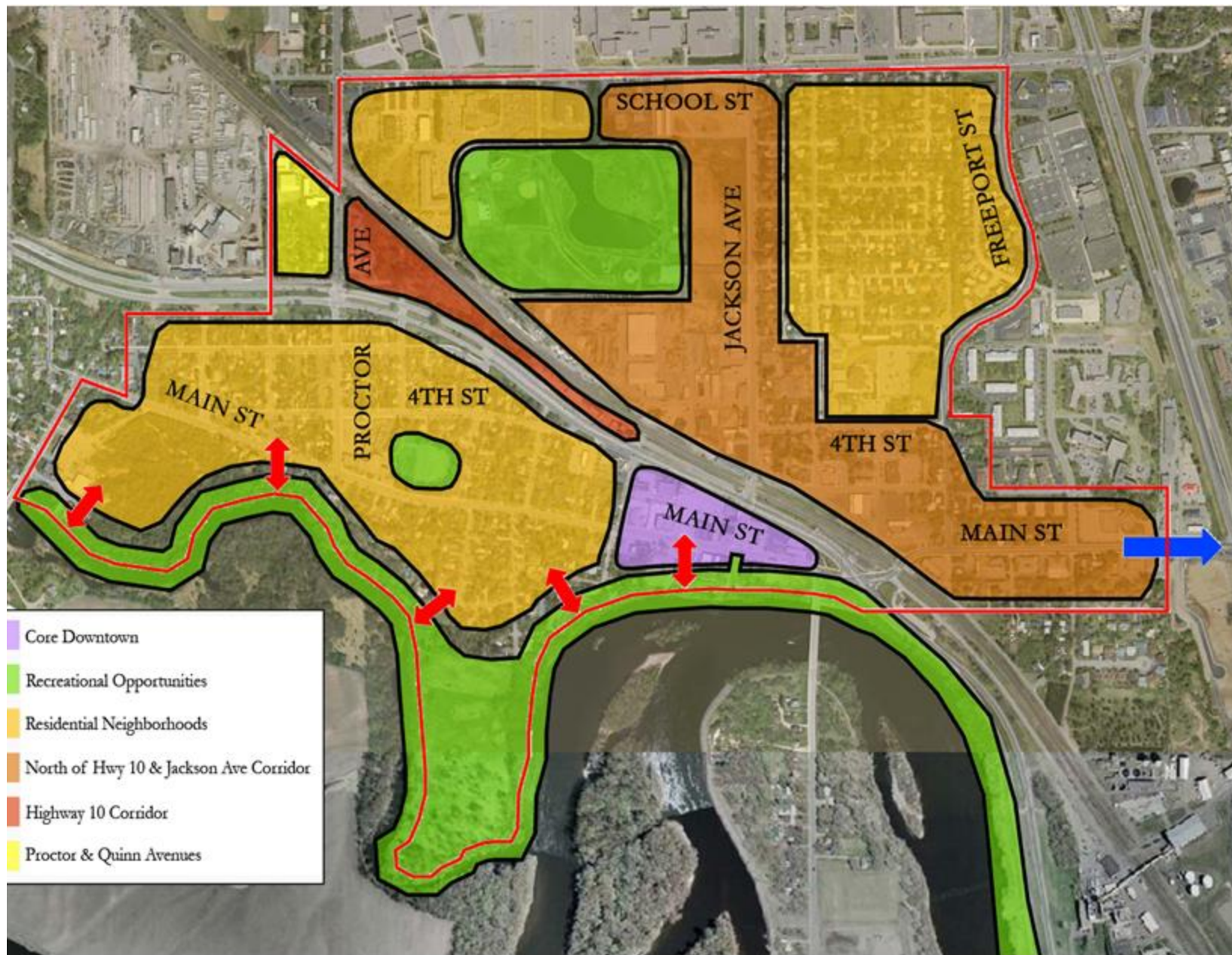
The Plan divides the study area into five “Focus Areas”. These areas allow for a more detailed discussion of the opportunities and approaches for key locations in the Study Area.

The Focus Areas are:

- Core Downtown
- Recreational Opportunities (Mississippi and Elk Rivers, Handke Stadium, River’s Edge Commons and Lion’s Park).
- Residential Neighborhoods
- North of Highway 10 (Mixed use redevelopment opportunity)
- Proctor and Quinn Avenues

The Study Area stems west, north and east of the core downtown area and is bisected in half by east/west transportation corridors – U.S. Highway 10 and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railroad.





e. Statutory Authority

Formally established by the City Council in 1980, the Housing & Redevelopment Authority (HRA) in and for the City of Elk River was formed under the public purposes identified in Minnesota State Statutes Sections 469.001 to 469.047 (Housing and Redevelopment Authority Act).

The Housing and Redevelopment Authority Act grants municipalities the authority to designate redevelopment areas within the boundaries of the municipalities. Within these areas, the municipality may adopt a redevelopment plan and establish a project consistent with the municipality's public purpose. The projects as contemplated by this plan are consistent with the definition of a "Redevelopment Project" as defined in Section 469.002, Subdivision 14. Essentially a "Redevelopment Project" includes any work or undertaking:

- 1) To acquire blighted areas and other real property for the purpose of removing, preventing, or reducing blight, blighting factors, or the causes of blight;
- 2) To clear any areas acquired and install, construct or reconstruct streets, utilities and site improvements essential to the preparation of sites for uses in accordance with the redevelopment plan;
- 3) To sell or lease land so acquired for uses in accordance with the redevelopment plan;
- 4) To prepare a redevelopment plan, and to incur initiation, planning, survey and other administrative costs of a redevelopment project, and to prepare technical and financial plans and arrangements for buildings, structures, and improvements and all other work in connection therewith; or
- 5) To conduct an urban renewal project. The term "urban renewal project" may include undertakings and activities for the elimination or for the prevention of the development or spread of slums or blighted or

deteriorating areas and may involve any work or undertaking for that purpose constituting a redevelopment project or any rehabilitation or conservation work.

Assuming that redevelopment will occur in multiple phases, the HRA and City Council have previously adopted a series of incremental redevelopment plans within the greater downtown area in order to satisfy Statute 469.028, which requires the HRA to adopt a redevelopment plan prior to accepting a development proposal.

Phase I - In November 2004 the HRA and City Council adopted a Downtown Phase I Redevelopment Plan in conjunction with Tax Increment Financing District No. 21. Phase I is known as Granite Shores and Jackson Place project, which resulted in a total of 67 for-sale condominium units, 32 rental units, and approximately 20,000 square feet of commercial lease space and underground parking. The original name of Granite Shores was The Bluffs of Elk River.

Phase II – In November 2006 the HRA and City adopted a Redevelopment Plan which allowed the HRA to secure a contract for deed on property in order to potentially expand the King Avenue parking lot in the future. The property consisted of two contiguous buildings, 716 Main Street and 720 Main Street, commonly known as "Main Street Mall".

Phase III - The *Illustrative Master Plan* is considered the next phase of the City's redevelopment planning process. Although this Plan is not in reaction to a specific development proposal, it serves to satisfy the statutory requirement for the City to adopt a redevelopment plan prior to accepting and undertaking development proposals within the study area.

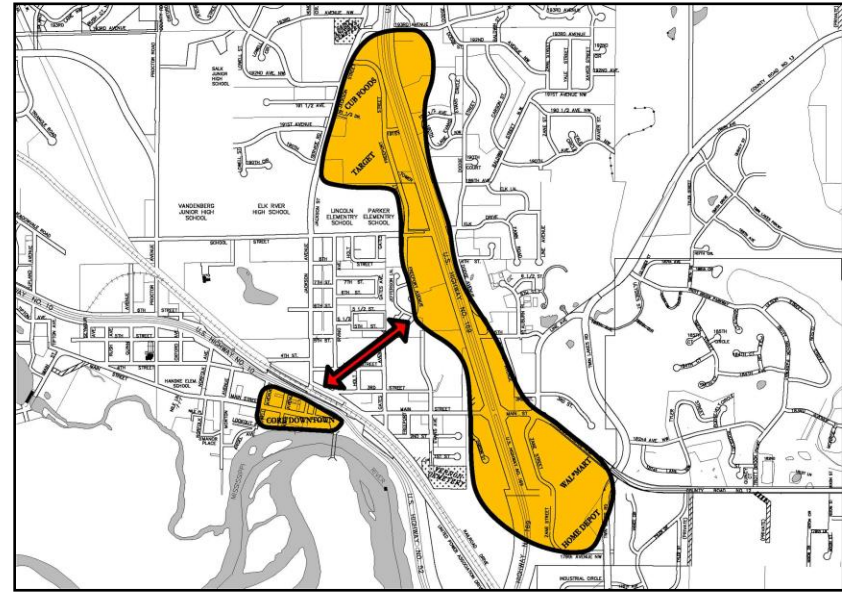
II. Summary of Existing Conditions

The Plan grew out of information collected and considered by the Task Force over several months. This section of the Plan highlights some of the key data sources that contributed to the planning process.

The Changing Face of Downtown

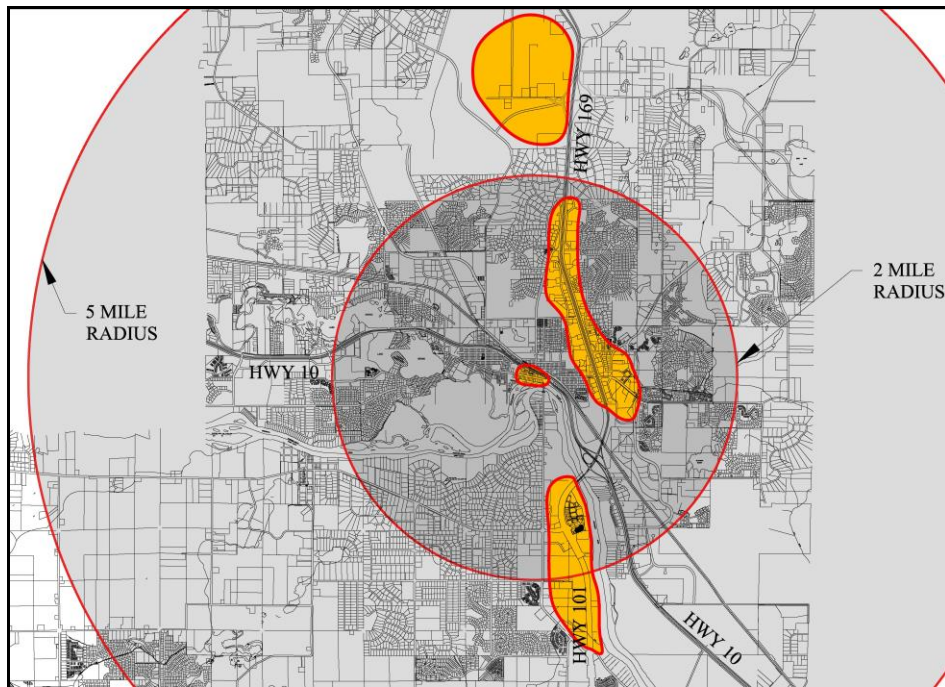
Historically, Elk River was a “freestanding community” (characterized by distance from the metropolitan area, self-contained economy, and limited transportation routes). An essential element of all freestanding communities was a core downtown area that served a highly agrarian economy. As is the case with many cities that are on the edge of the metropolitan area, the form and function of our downtown has changed based on a series of factors, these being:

- Incorporation of the City of Elk River and the Township in the late 1970’s started the process of land development through public utility extensions.
- As part of this process, the TH 169 corridor opened to commercial development ultimately creating competition for the downtown area, starting in the early 1980’s.
- Over the past thirty years, shopping habits have shifted to larger complexes of value and destination shopping.
- Loyalty to shopping areas has been replaced by value attached to location and accessibility.
 - As retail moved out of our downtown area it has been replaced with office uses. Less retail starts the chain of other retail uses not having a significant synergy to exist and in turn, seeking other market areas.
- The economic downturn starting in 2008 has hampered ability of smaller businesses from opening or continuing businesses. It is these businesses that are the primary market for a downtown area of our size.

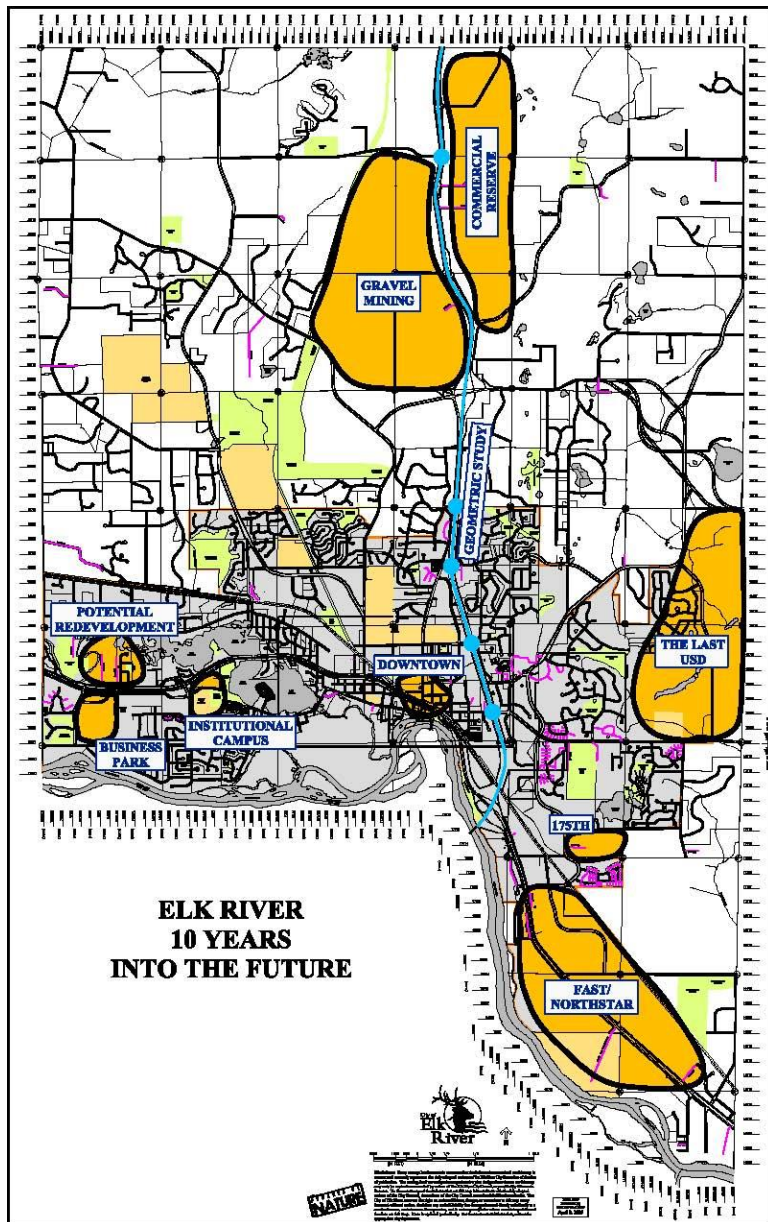


Some of the challenges for the downtown area will include:

- The Natures Edge Business Center and the Northstar Corridor will challenge market share from the downtown area
- CORE (Ramsey) and Waterfront East (Otsego) provide greenfield development opportunities for businesses and housing not unlike those necessary for the vitality of the study area.
- The loss of direct access from Highway 10 will hinder some businesses that rely on convenience sales.
- The lack of privately owned parking suggests a perception that there is not enough parking downtown, hampering business traffic.
- Future commercial development in the gravel mining.
- Limiting the City's population to 35,000 reduces the need for expanded commercial services



Commercial Radius



10 Year Projections

Land Use

The study area contains the following current land uses based off of tax classification information registered with Sherburne County.

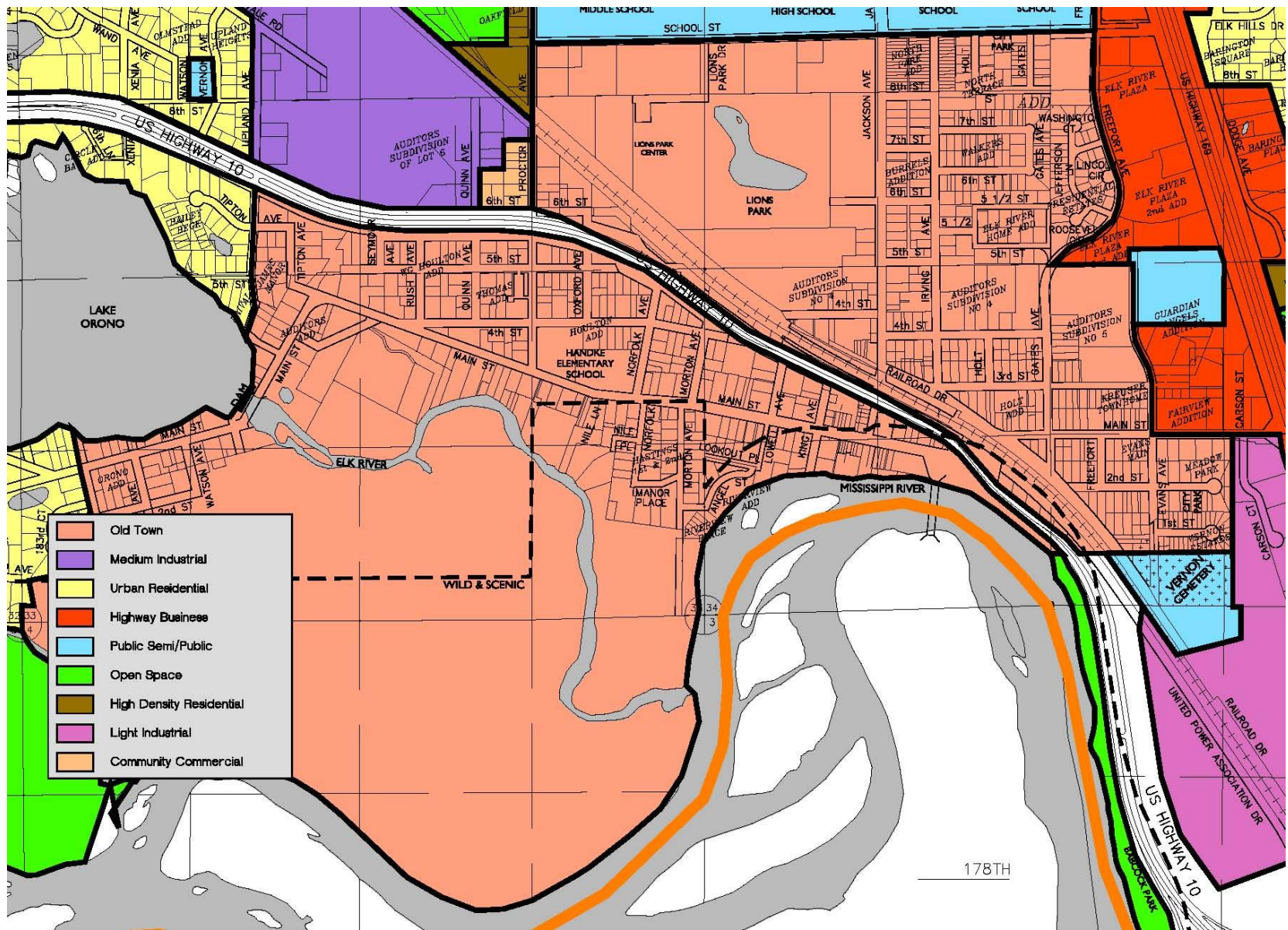
Tax Classification	Acreage	Square feet*	# of parcels
Single Family Residential	193.71	481,516	511
Apartments (4 or more units)	10.34	293,376	15
Low Income Rental	0.46	92,516	2
Residential (2-3 units)	5	n/a	9
Charitable Institutions	0.8	3,381	2
Church Properties	5.15	128,093	19
Commercial	87.38	547,520	102
Commercial (over 150K)	6.37	88,311	20
County Public Prop.	1.62	3,000	3
Industrial	1.69	58,744	6
K-12 Private School	5.9	n/a	1
K-12 Public Schools	2.22	49,950	7
Municipal	23.32	69,302	40
Public Utility	1.47	n/a	2
Agricultural	0.25	n/a	1
Other	2	n/a	6
Totals	348	1,815,709	745
* Building square feet estimated			

Consistency with Comprehensive Plan

The 2004 Comprehensive Plan, adopted by the City Council on August 16, 2004 included a land use category identified as “Old Town”. The Plan recognized that the Old Town area was a diverse blend of uses, styles, and characters, and further, a focused study was necessary to identify, preserve and protect that diversity. The following image indicates the Study Area in relationship to the Old Town area.

The Old Town area, as defined in the 2004 Comprehensive Plan includes several differing land uses, including high, medium, and low density residential, Highway, Central and Office Commercial.

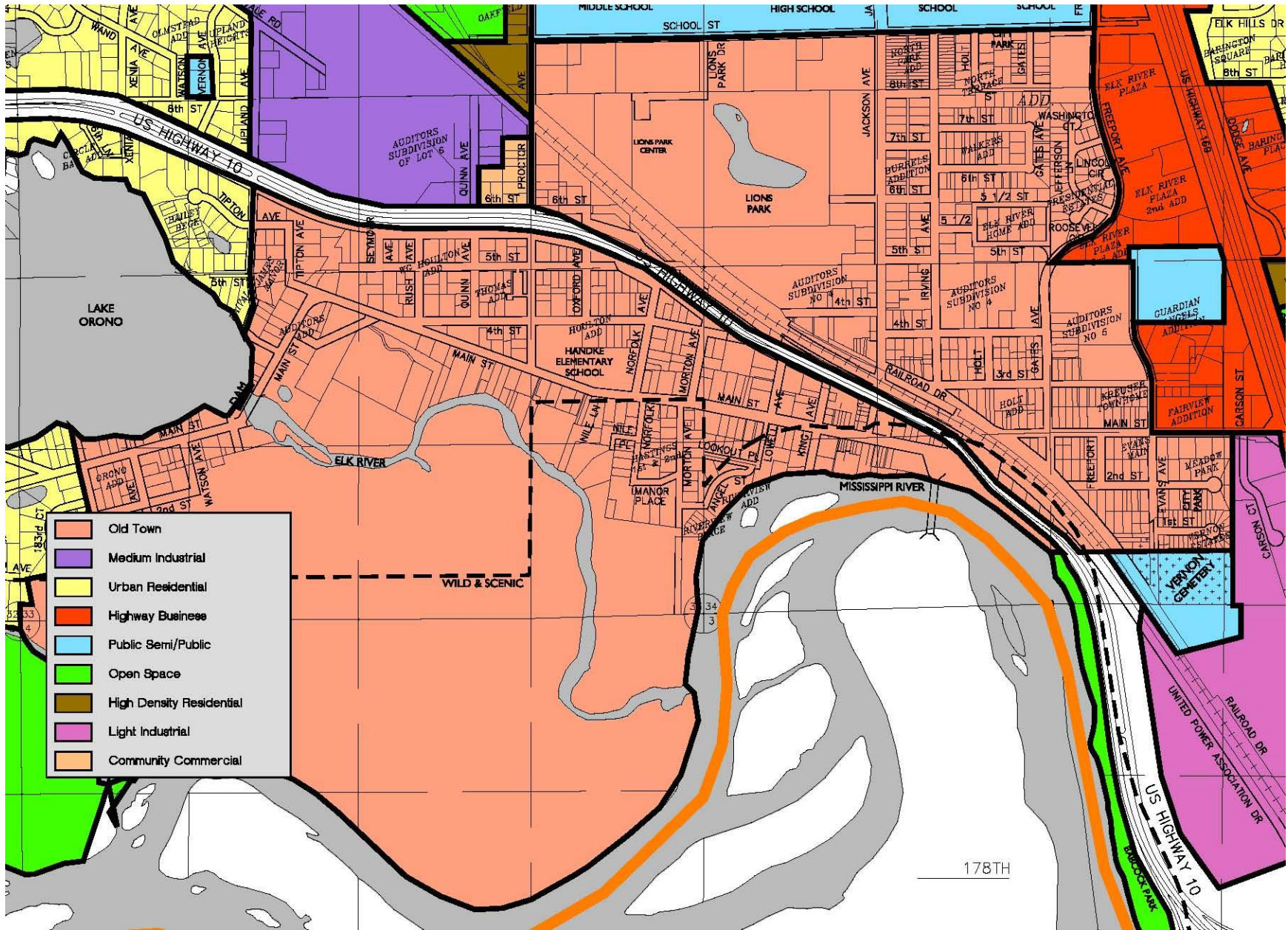
The Plan is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan in that the mix and balance of uses within the area are maintained, although some realignment of infrastructure is necessary to ensure that the land is developed to its highest and best use.



Land Use Map - Partial

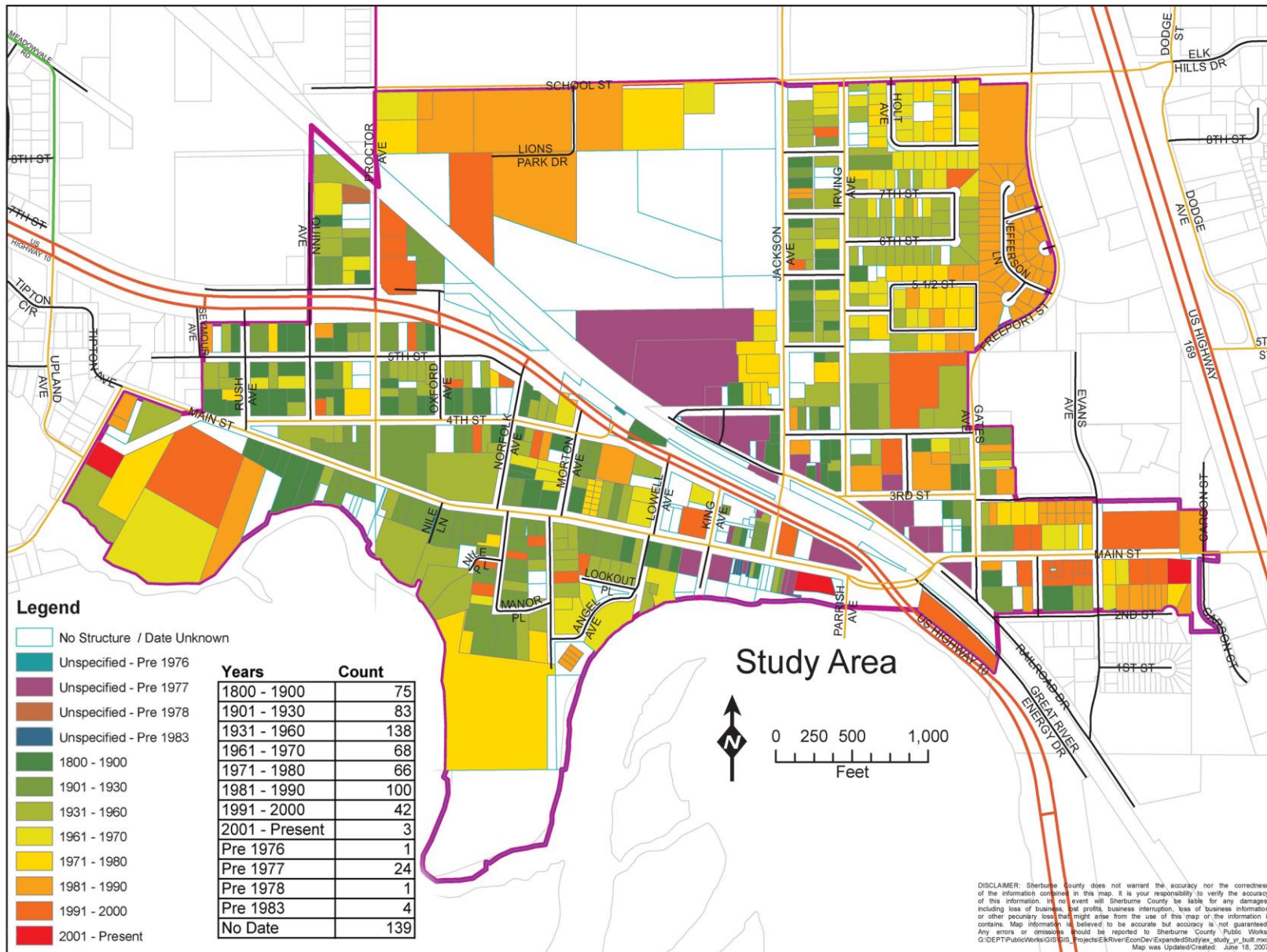
Zoning

Zoning designations show the current land use controls that apply to property in the Study Area. The Study Area includes a variety of zoning districts as indicated on the following image.



Year Built

Based on building permit issuance, the following image depicts the age of each primary structure and/or any improvements made to properties located the Study Area.



The Need to Redefine

To evaluate the need for redevelopment, the Task Force completed a series of exercises and small group discussions.

Characteristics of “Downtown” Exercise

The first exercise asked Task Force members to define the “Components of a successful downtown” and describe “What downtown means”. Their responses included the following in no particular order:

What makes a downtown successful?

- ❖ “Heart” or center
- ❖ Nostalgia
- ❖ Authenticity
- ❖ Unique/traditional (sets us apart from suburban development)
- ❖ Past, present and future planning
- ❖ Shopping/eating

Why do you come downtown?

- ❖ Diversity of activity
- ❖ Destination
- ❖ Tradition
- ❖ Special events/ entertainment

How do you know when you are downtown?

- ❖ Mass of historic buildings
- ❖ Signage

What does downtown mean to you?

- ❖ Vitality
- ❖ Interest, not necessity
- ❖ Commercial, retail and service
- ❖ Connectivity, transition, cohesive

- ❖ New residential
- ❖ Accessibility
 - Pedestrians
 - Traffic flow/access points
 - River
- ❖ History
- ❖ Activities/amenities
- ❖ Aesthetically pleasing
- ❖ Balance of old and new
- ❖ Charm, pleasant feel
- ❖ Brick and south Main Blocks

What should downtown have that it doesn't

- ❖ Embellishments (flags, plantings, color)
- ❖ Specialty businesses
- ❖ Signage
 - Directional
 - Informative

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats Exercise

The second exercise involved a discussion of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats, a summary of which is provided in the Appendix.

It was a result of this exercise in which the Task Force reached consensus that “Downtown Elk River” has already changed, as a result of time and market, to a point where it is no longer the thriving commercial center it was 50 years prior. Further, consensus was that “Downtown Elk River” needs to reinvent itself as the historical, cultural, and energetic core of community. With the core established and strengthened, the service and office uses will reemerge in the area, even when changes to Highway 10 require more destination driven trips.

Recent Public & Private Investments

There have been a number of significant private improvements to the area in recent years.



First National



Bank of Elk River

- First National Financial Center Building (Year 2000)
- The Bank of Elk River Expansion (Year 2005)

These private investments contribute significantly to increase the city's taxable market value and maximize the benefit of public investments as shown in the table below:

Market Value Expansion

Project	Market Value <i>Before</i>	Estimated Market Value <i>After</i>	Add'l tax payable 2012
Granite Shores	\$833,225	\$9,241,600	\$89,963
Jackson Place	\$175,800	\$3,221,800	\$36,092
The Bank of Elk River Expansion Project	\$1,395,600	\$4,239,300	\$56,874
	\$2,606,100	\$13,902,900	\$182,929



Before



After – Granite Shores



Before - Jackson



After - Jackson

In 2001, the Elk River Housing & Redevelopment Authority (HRA) determined that downtown Elk River's long-term vitality should be a community goal. At the same time, several key parcels along the riverfront became for sale, which prompted the HRA to solicit development proposals from approximately 100 developers in order to form a public/private partnership to revitalize downtown Elk River. After receiving five development proposals, the HRA and City Council selected MetroPlains Development to further refine their development concepts.

Five years later, concepts turned into reality and Granite Shores and Jackson Place redevelopment projects were constructed. The projects added approximately 20,000 square feet of space for new businesses and over 100 new residents to the downtown.

As a result of these private investments, the City was able to expand the King Avenue parking lot and construct the long-awaited River's Edge Commons Park.

In 2010, the City purchased the parking lot behind the Sunshine Depot block. This purchase retained approximately 70 parking spaces in public ownership.

In 2012, the Elk River Lutheran Church began redevelopment of the former 1st National Bank building into their new worship center. Included in the improvements was an easement to provide a trail along the river, a landscaped refuge center near Main Street, and a community room overlooking the river.

In 2012, the HRA, due to poor building conditions and rising maintenance costs, removed the Main Street Mall at 720 and 716 Main Street. In their place, a 28 stall parking lot was added.

As part of its exploration and understanding of the study area, the Task Force considered the following conditions and issues:

- Previous Relevant Studies
- Natural, Cultural and Recreational Amenities
- Market Conditions
- Transportation and Infrastructure
- Historic Context

Previous Relevant Studies

Over the years the City has conducted several studies of the area in an effort to continue to encourage redevelopment and revitalization of downtown.

The objectives identified by these studies remain relevant thirty-five years later. These objectives demonstrate the long-term nature of redevelopment planning. The 2007 Redevelopment Framework Plan validates many of these objectives, as summarized below:

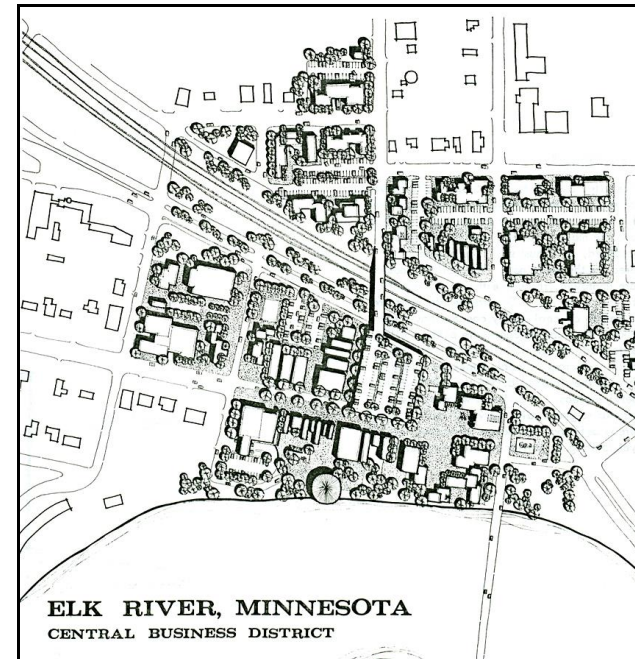
1970 – Elk River Central Business District Report

Prepared by Nason, Wehrman, Knight & Chapman, Inc.

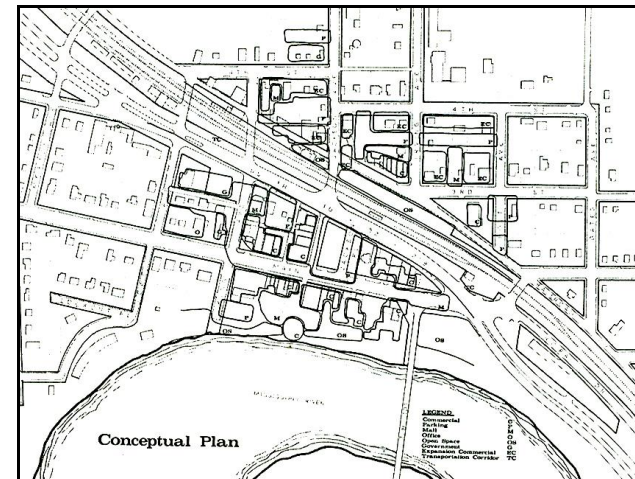
The report established general guidelines for the physical appearance, movement patterns and development potentials for a 20-year timeframe.

Primary objectives included:

- Unify existing and new buildings for the districts unique character
- Remove traffic conflicts (e.g. Hwy 10 overpass to connect north and south areas)
- Provide adequate parking (e.g. parking ramp)
- Utilize natural setting of the Mississippi River (e.g. restaurant)



1970



1970

1982 – Elk River Downtown Redevelopment Plan

Prepared by Zack Johnson & Associates, Inc.

The plan established a guide to evaluate physical improvements, develop zoning policies, and establish a Capital Improvements Program. The plan identified priority improvements and redevelopment opportunities.

Primary objectives included:

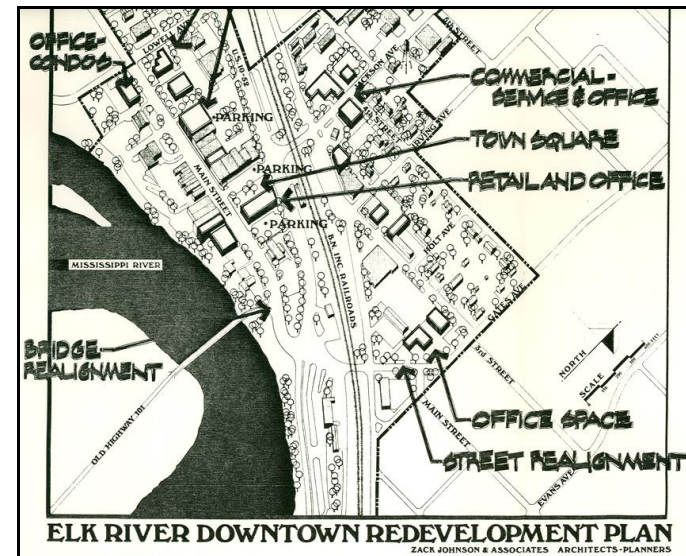
- Rehabilitate architecturally and historically significant buildings (e.g. design standards)
- Concentrate retail/office land uses south of Hwy 10
- Concentrate service businesses north of Hwy 10
- Concentrate high-density residential west of Lowell Avenue
- Identified priority redevelopment areas:
 - Town Square (known as Jackson Square)
 - King Avenue & Main Street
 - Former Star News building to former Cinema building.

1986 – Governor's Design Team

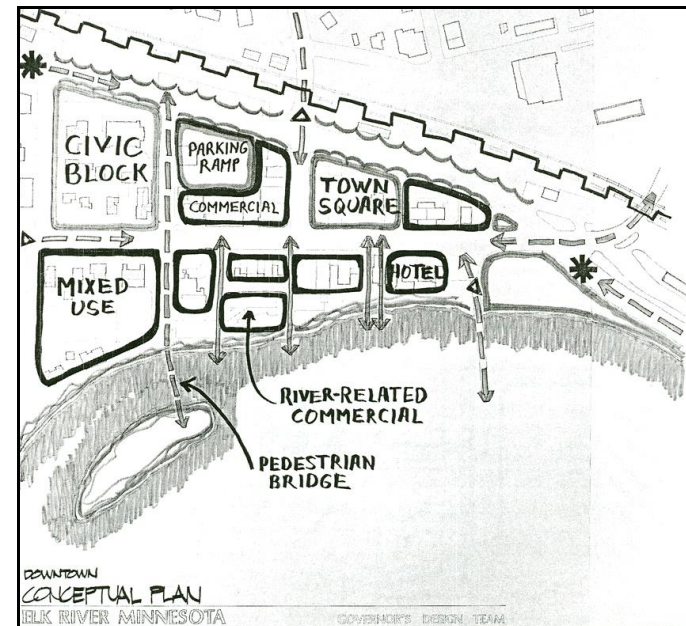
Prepared by a team of professionals and active community participation, an overall plan was developed for the city's Central Business District (CBD).

Primary objectives included:

- Promote downtown as a “unique historic river town”
- Link downtown to the community through open space and a trail system
- Utilize the Mississippi River with a restaurant, hotel or community center uses
- Consider a parking ramp for heavy traffic areas (e.g. King Avenue area)



1982



1986

1988 – Elk River River-walk Project

Prepared by Brauer & Associates Ltd.

The report created a river-walk design and outlined the financial feasibility for a new building on the former Hardware store site at the south intersection of Jackson Avenue and Main Street.

Primary objectives included:

- Create more retail/service traffic via a restaurant
- Generate more interest in the Mississippi River via a boardwalk trail
- Develop design standards for rehabilitation and new construction

1994 – Mississippi River-walk Pathways Plan

Prepared by Hoisington-Koegler Group, Inc.

The planning process utilized a local committee to establish a vision and cost estimate for developing the river-walk.

Primary objectives included:

- Create an interpretive walking/biking trail along the river that depicts the early transportation history of the region

1998 – Central Business District Action Plan

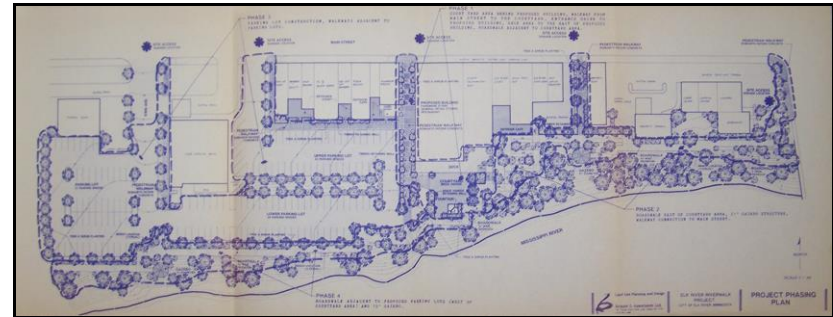
Prepared by Theresa Washburn

The plan created the foundation for developing a downtown master plan, and completing activities through working committees.

Primary objectives included:

- Utilize the river, an arts center, pedestrian pathways and a beautification plan

- Develop design standards for signage, façade improvements, interior improvements and new construction.
- Develop activities and events (e.g. Heritage festival, winter festival, mural event)
- Conduct a market analysis to assist business recruitment



1988



1994

2002- Historic Context Study

Prepared by Landscape Research, Carole Zeillie

This study reviewed the history of select downtown commercial properties in the context of historical, architectural and landscape architecture features and themes.

23 properties south of 10, north of main street, east of King Avenue, and west of Jackson were inventoried and evaluated in these contexts. The study found that none of the properties appear to be eligible for the National Register, although five properties along Jackson street, recognized for their local significance, were recommended for further study. In particular the Kemper drugstore was recognized as locally significant as a well conserved example of an early 1960's retail building.

More discussion of the Historic Context Study can be found on page 36 of this document.

Natural, Cultural and Recreational Amenities

Mississippi River

The Mississippi River through Elk River is classified by the Minnesota State Wild & Scenic Rivers Program as a “Recreational River”. The area is classified as a Recreational River because it has undergone some impoundments and/or diversions in the past and has adjacent lands which are considerably developed, but are still capable of being managed.

The City of Elk River adopted the Wild & Scenic River Ordinance to regulate the subdivision, use, and conservation of the shorelands to preserve and protect the existing natural, scenic, historical, scientific, and recreational values. The regulations also reduce the effects of overcrowding and poorly planned development of adjacent lands, prevent pollution, preserve a natural beauty and quietude, maintain proper relationships between various land use types, and prohibit new uses that are inconsistent with the statewide standards and criteria.

Public access to the Mississippi River is under-utilized; limited largely by private property ownership along the shorelines and topographic constraints. Island areas are owned and controlled by the MN Dept of Natural Resources (DNR), except with one major island in private ownership.

Elk River

The Elk River is classified as an “Urban River” through Elk River. The area is classified as an Urban River because it flows through an incorporated area. The city has a 300 foot shore land overlay district along the river to provide for wise development, to preserve and enhance the quality of the surface waters, and to preserve the economic and natural values of the shore land area.

The Mississippi and Elk riverfronts are significant assets for the entire community. It is an authentic amenity for the community, and potentially the region, but it has to be connected to where people are and easily accessible from the community as a whole.



Mississippi River



Elk River south of Dam

Historic Elkhi Stadium

Most commonly referred to by locals as Handke Stadium, due to its location next to the original Handke High School, the Elkhi Stadium is one of the landmarks of downtown Elk River. On May 26, 2004 Elkhi Stadium was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Built in the 1920's when volunteers turned a slough in a natural amphitheater into a playing field, the stadium was the place for a variety of high school athletic games over the years. During the winter, kids sledded down the hills and skated on the village's only ice rink.

Over the years the stadium aged and fell into disrepair. The stone warming house that was added in the 1930's by WPA crews was rebuilt in 2000-2005 with funds raised by the Elk River Rotary Club. The club completed additional restorations as well, including: a gas fireplace addition to the warming house, the stone wall was replaced, the steps were repaired, a stone plaza containing the original Handke High School bell was built at one of the entrances to the stadium and the area was landscaped.

Today the beautifully restored stadium is used for recreational hockey, ice skating and other events.



1920's - Construction



2007



Bell Tower



Ice Skating

Rivers Edge Commons Park

Rivers Edge Commons Park, completed in June 2007, is located at the intersection of Main Street and Jackson Avenue and extends from Main Street to the Mississippi River.

The City acquired the parcel for the purpose of future park space in the late 1980's following the fire of a local hardware store. Over the years the City considered design enhancements to develop the site as the central plaza with a boardwalk trail, or "river-walk", which would extend along the river through the downtown area. Due to the cost of the park improvements the project was postponed until further private investment in the downtown area justified the large public expenditure.

In 2006, as a result of over \$30-million of private investment with the addition of The Bluffs of Elk River, Jackson Place and The Bank of Elk River expansion, the City commenced construction of the park improvement project. The park includes a street-level plaza, splash fountains, a natural amphitheater and a gazebo at the river level.

The Park is currently home to the Riverfront Concert series, a very popular program drawing hundreds of music fans to the downtown area on Thursday evenings in the summer month.

Lions Park

The 34-acre Lion's Park is located at the northern portion of the study area, just south of School Street. Amenities included are 4 picnic shelters, paved trails, hockey rinks, a sliding hill, a 9-disc golf course, a skateboarding park, playground equipment, and a band shell. A majority of the improvements have been funded over the years by the local Lion's Club.

Lions Park is home to many of the City's recreational programs.



Rivers Edge Commons



Lions Park



Lions Park

Market Conditions

Market research provides a context for redevelopment planning. This research examines the type, form and quantity of new development that could occur in downtown Elk River. The market research helps to direct the type and scale of new development to locations where new investment provides the greatest positive effects.

2001 Market Analysis

In April 2001, Maxfield Research, Inc. was retained by the HRA to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the market potential for redevelopment for Elk River's downtown. The research included an analysis of the existing supply and market conditions of housing, retail and office in the area. Growth trends and demographic characteristics were analyzed to consider the impact on the potential to develop various land uses in the study area.

The analysis identified 3 distinct areas in the study area based on current land uses and physical barriers, opportunities and challenges. The report recommendations focused on development potential for each area and strategies to enable the areas to compliment one another.

The three areas are:

1. Core Central Business District – *south of railroad, east of King Avenue*
The analysis cited this area as best suited for specialty retail and for-sale multi-family housing.
2. Northern Area – *north of railroad*
The analysis cited this area as best suited for service businesses, such as office and institutions, along with rental and senior housing.
3. Western Transition Area – *south of railroad, west of King Avenue*
The analysis cited this area as best suited for multi-family housing.

The market analysis report quantified demand for additional housing, retail and office space in the downtown area for the period 2000 to 2010.

Demand Summary Downtown Elk River Redevelopment Area 2000 to 2010	
Housing	
For-Sale Multifamily	95-115 units
Market Rate Apartments	300-360 units
Market Rate Senior Housing	60-70 units
Office	19,000-39,000 sq. ft.
Retail*	14,000 sq. ft.
* Demand through 2005	
Source: Maxfield Research Inc.	

Prior to use of public funds to facilitate redevelopment, it is suggested that the market analysis be updated.

In addition, the report identified sites that have the greatest potential for redevelopment based on the positive impact it would have on the downtown.

2007 Adjusted Market Analysis

The table below reflects the remaining balance of demand available after reducing the initial demand by the recent development activity that has taken place within the Study Area. These recent developments include:

Housing:

Granite Shores for-rent multi-family 67 units
Jackson Place apartments 32 units

Office:

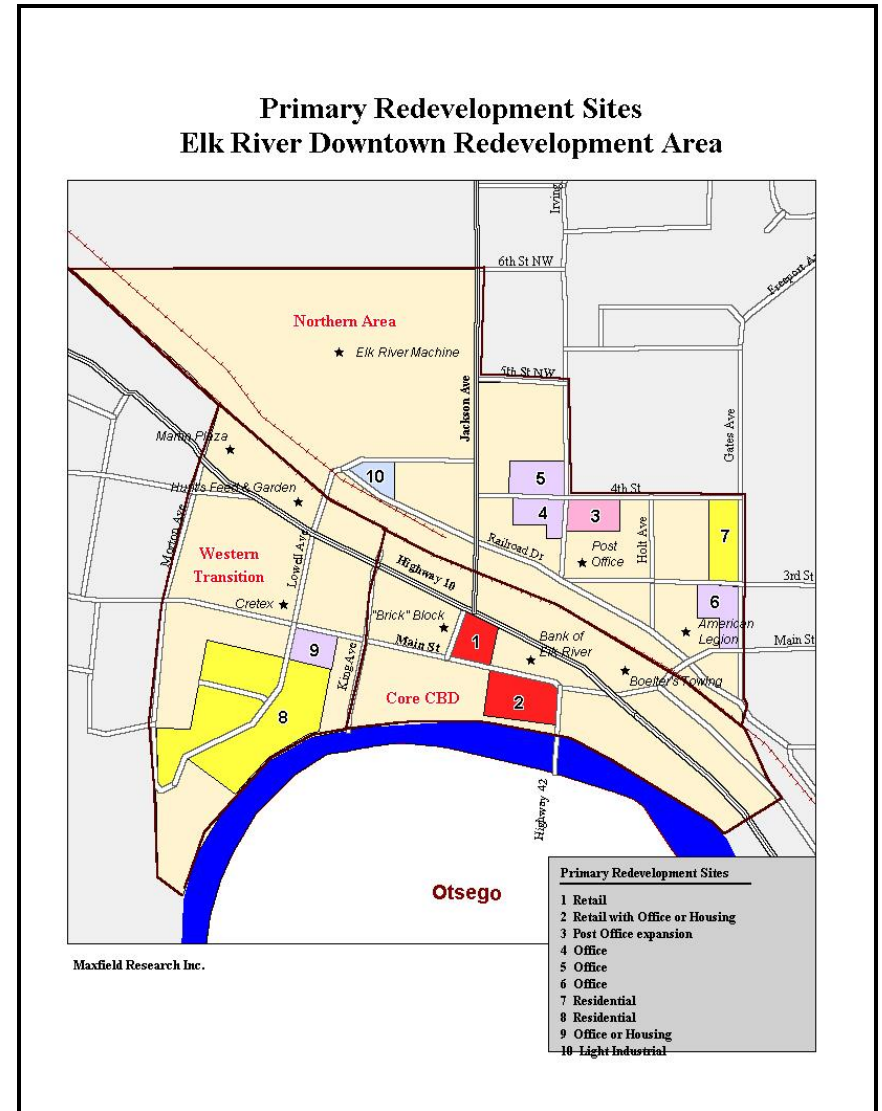
The Bank of Elk River expansion 20,000 sf

Retail:

The Bluffs commercial 10,000 sf
Jackson Place commercial 10,000 sf

The balance indicates remaining housing demand to 2010. Redevelopment proposals that exceed the indicated demand during that time shall be supported by an up to date market analysis.

Demand Summary Downtown Elk River Redevelopment Area 2007 to 2010		
Housing		
For-Sale Multifamily		48 units
Market Rate Apartments		300-328 units
Market Rate Senior Housing		60-70 units
Source: Maxfield Research Inc. & City of Elk River		



Transportation and Infrastructure

Railroad

The railroad has right-of-way moving approximately 77 trains per day through the area on two sets of tracks. The line carries passenger and freight trains.

Vehicle and pedestrian crossing concerns may be alleviated if Railroad Drive, which runs adjacent to the railroad, is removed as a frontage road eliminating close access to Highway 10.

U.S. Highway 10

2003-2023 Statewide Transportation Plan

No improvements are planned for Highway 10 through the downtown area for many years, according to the Minnesota Department of Transportation's (MnDOT) 2003-2023 Statewide Transportation Plan.

Interregional Corridor Management Plan

MnDOT completed several Interregional Corridor Management Plans in 2001 and early 2002, one of which included the stretch of Highway 10 from approximately Highway 101 to Proctor Avenue. The results of the Plan suggested that even if a \$21 million (2001 dollars) investment is spent on elevating Highway 10 through downtown, the level of service will not be improved from an "F" rating in peak times.

If funding were to become available to MnDOT District 3, the district in which Elk River is located, MnDOT would most likely fund improvements to Highway 169 in Elk River as opposed to Highway 10 since MnDOT rates Highway 169 as a "high

priority" highway, whereas Highway 10 is rated "medium priority".

On October 14, 2002, the Elk River City Council adopted Resolution 02-93 "Accepting, Supporting and Adopting the TH 10 Interregional Corridor Management Plan".

A major pivot point in the 2006 Task Force discussions involved the Highway 10 routing through the study area. These discussions, and the impact they had on the plan, led the City Council to table the process until the Highway 10 plan could be developed. Through their discussions, the Task Force developed a number of scenarios and sketches to visually understand the design implications Highway 10 improvements. These sketches are included in the appendix as they are important to the history of the planning process, and provide valuable information to the user in understanding the changes that are coming.

Future Highway 10 Issues

In 2008, MnDOT finalized a plan for improvements to Highway 10 as it routes through the study area, submitting it to the Federal Highway Administration for their review. This plan was prepared through the collaborative efforts of MnDOT, Sherburne County, the City of Elk River, and many others.

The proposed Highway 10 improvements represent a significant change to the downtown area, and a major impetus for this planning project. In summary, the plan shows Highway 10 evolving into a freeway through the study area. To accommodate the necessary speeds and capacity, the main line will shift to the north, requiring the Burlington Northern, Santa Fe rail line to shift to the north, in the area of present day railroad drive. Access to the study area from Highway 10 will be via interchanges at Proctor and south of Main street, with the

entrances to the off ramps many blocks away. Local circulation will be handled via a surface frontage road, the southern boundary of which is near the current southern curb of Highway 10 mainline. An underpass between present day Jackson and King will maintain the north south connection of Jackson.

Anticipating these access and visibility impacts, it is important that stakeholders work toward establishing the core area as a destination of sufficient strength that it can withstand these changes.

Historic Context

The study area encompasses the 432-acre core of the City of Elk River. This core includes many of the first generation homes and first platted neighborhoods in the City. In addition, it is the Mississippi River and the railroad, both located in the study area, which largely defines the historic development pattern of the City.

In 2002 the HRA and HPC commissioned an independent study of properties within the core downtown area, in response to concerns raised by the Heritage Preservation Commission regarding the then proposed Bluffs and Jackson Place developments. It was conducted by Carole Zellie of Landscape Research.

Part I of the study outlined six Elk River Historic Contexts for which to provide a framework with which to evaluate the historic, architectural, and landscape architectural significance of inventoried properties. The Elk River historic contexts identified in the study are:

- 1) Landscape Setting, 1848-1950
- 2) Agriculture, 1850-1950
- 3) Transportation, 1848-1950
- 4) Industry and Commerce, 1851-1950
- 5) Residential Architecture, 1851-1920
- 6) Schools, Churches, and Local Institutions, 1857-1920

Part II of the Historic Context Study included an inventory of 23 properties in the Elk River downtown commercial area. The study assisted in determining the significance of historic resources

in downtown Elk River and assessed their potential National Register of Historic Places eligibility.

The study concluded that none of the 23 properties appeared to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. However, 5 buildings on the west side of Jackson Ave were recommended for further preservation study as having significance as part of early twentieth-century downtown Elk River and retaining varying amounts of their historic facades. These buildings are commonly referred to as the “Brick and S. Main Blocks”.



Jackson Avenue – Brick Block “Then and Now”

In addition to review of the Historic Context Study, the Task Force considered an overview of historically significant properties as identified by the City's Heritage Preservation Commission and policy recommendations. It is the consensus of the Task Force that core downtown area contains much of the history of Elk River, and serves as the cultural foundation of the community. While the area may not be deemed historic from a national or statewide perspective, it is Elk River History, and important in that respect. Every effort should be employed to preserve these buildings to further communicate the link to the past that they represent.